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ABSTRACT

In contrast to many senior education programs, the senior program at Triton College (TC) has as one of its aims bringing together younger and older students in both noncredit and credit courses without neglecting the need and desire of many older adults to learn in their own age group. The term "older students" is loosely defined at the college, but tuition is lower for those 60 years of age and older. The TC program offers a wide variety of courses especially but not exclusively for older students. All daytime noncredit courses are listed not only in a brochure for older adults, but also in the general continuing education bulletin. The courses which are most successful at attracting both older and younger students are regular credit courses. Credit courses offered in recent terms included Practical Psychology, Music Appreciation, Floral Design, and World Religions, with the last most successful in bringing together equal numbers of older and younger students. Near the completion of fall 1990, a questionnaire was administered to the 16 students who enrolled in World Religions to obtain their reactions to the mixed-age class. Four of 13 students responding were in the 17-25 age bracket, while eight of the students were over 60. While the younger students felt that they were treated somewhat condescendingly, all students, both younger and older, strongly supported mixed-age classes as beneficial to learning. Appendixes contain a paper entitled "Why Does Triton Have a Special Program for Older Adults?" a brochure on Triton's "Lifelong Learner Program in the Liberal Arts," a publicity sheet for a certificate program designed to encourage older students to take more challenging courses, and an article on TC's "Education Center on Aging." (JMC)

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WITH EYES OF EQUALITY
Older and Younger Students Learn Together in a Community College Senior Program

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Presented at the 17th Annual Meeting of the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, Pittsburgh
February 28 - March 3, 1991

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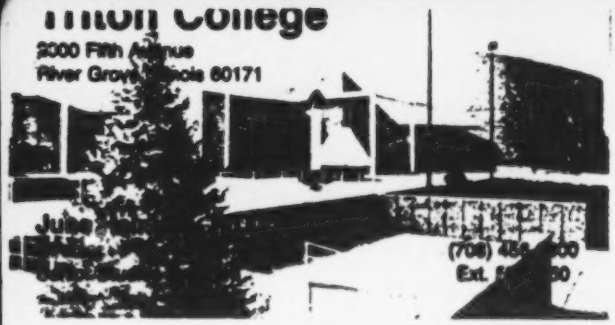

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WITH EYES OF EQUALITY

Older and Younger Students Learn Together in a Community College Senior Program

by JUNE SARK HEINRICH, Ph.D.
Director, Senior Studies Program
Triton College, River Grove, Illinois

"I feel we must look at each other with eyes of equality instead of eyes of suspicion."

"In order for people to get along, they must look beyond their peer group and see what's going on around them."

Thus spake twentysomething and sixtysomething students in a fall, 1990 class at Triton College, a community college serving a suburban area at the western edge of Chicago. What is noteworthy about such an intergenerational experience? It is unlike intergenerational experiences in which one generation brings its strengths and skills and caring to help the other needy, weaker generation -- for example, younger people helping older people with home chores or older people tutoring younger people. In the Triton class referred to, younger and older people came together as equals with individual differences, including age, but with a common desire and opportunity to learn about a subject of interest to both. The subject was World Religions, and as students learned about the subject they learned about and from each other.

Of course, intergenerational experiences are offered on most college campuses, especially in recent years as increasing numbers of older people have returned to school for degrees and job training as well as for noncredit continuing education. In most college classes, however, it is likely that the majority of students are well under 50 rather than well over 50. Where large numbers of senior students do attend college classes, they are likely to be in special senior programs where they learn with others in their own general age group.

In contrast to many senior education programs perhaps, the senior program at Triton College has as one of its aims bringing together younger and older students in both noncredit and credit courses without neglecting the need and desire of many older adults to learn in their own age group. It is to be hoped that in some still far-off future most older people will no longer have this need or desire because of their integration into mainstream society with equal opportunity to education and jobs. But "there is at present a clear need in a community college for a place and program where older adults can come together for

support in their pursuit of learning." (See paper attached titled "Why Does Triton Have a Special Program for Older Adults?")

TRITON'S SENIOR STUDIES PROGRAM

The Senior Studies Program at Triton College offers a wide variety of courses especially but not exclusively for "older adults," loosely defined although tuition is lower for those 60 and over. Course subjects range from Great Books to Great Decisions in foreign policy, from Physical Fitness to Financial Planning, from Singing and Tap Dancing to Philosophy and Flower Arranging. These are all daytime noncredit courses, promoted in a brochure sent mainly to older adults. To reach out to younger students, these "senior" courses are also included in the general continuing education bulletin, which lists both evening and daytime noncredit courses with no specific age labeling. Senior Studies Program noncredit courses that have attracted at least a few students in their 20s and 30s include Tai Chi, Painting and Drawing, Drama Workshop, Beginning Piano, and Writer's Workshop.

All of these continuing education noncredit courses are offered on the main Triton campus, many of them in a large room commonly referred to as the Senior Center although it is used by many non-senior groups. A few courses are offered off campus at community sites. These sites are usually senior citizens' centers or civic centers, but it is noteworthy that an innovative pilot project has proved nursing homes to be promising sites, with exciting implications for those who work or reside in such facilities. In the spring of 1989 two Triton continuing education courses -- in psychology and music -- were offered in two nursing homes with mixed-age classes made up of residents and mostly much younger staff people. Residents and staff learned together as equals, "with eyes of equality." (See article attached titled "Good Learning in Nursing Homes.")

To encourage seniors to take more intellectually challenging continuing education courses, Triton's Senior Studies Program offers a special credit "Lifelong Learner Program in the Liberal Arts." Upon the successful completion of six courses identified as Lifelong Learner courses, a student is awarded a Lifelong Learner certificate and gold key pin. (See attached flyer titled "Lifelong Learner Program in the Liberal Arts.")

The courses that are the most successful in attracting both older and younger students, however, are regular credit courses. The Senior Studies Program promotes in its course brochure some regular credit courses thought likely to interest both younger and older students. Credit courses offered in recent terms include Practical Psychology, Music Appreciation, Floral Design, and World Religions. This last course, World Religions, has been the most successful in bringing together fairly equal numbers of younger and older students. In a world of terrible conflicts

between groups of people, it is easy to understand the common interest younger and older people have in learning about religions and cultures. It is not their reactions to subject matter, however, that are to be reported here but rather their reactions to learning in mixed-age classes.

REACTIONS TO MIXED-AGE CLASSES

The fall, 1990 World Religions course was made up of almost equal numbers of younger and older students. Enrolled were 9 older adults and 7 much younger students. There was much discussion and much interaction between students. The course is a regular Triton credit course and all of the older students did receive credit that could be used in working toward degrees.

Near the end of the course, a questionnaire was given to students present to get some idea of their reactions to the mixed-age classes. (A copy of the questionnaire is on the following page.) Unfortunately several younger students were absent the day the questionnaire was handed out and there was not a later opportunity to get their reactions. The total number of students who did fill out questionnaires is as follows:

Ages 17-25	4 students
Ages 41-60	1 student
Ages Over 60	8 students

In item 2 of the questionnaire that asked how students feel about learning in a mixed-age class, ALL of the older students checked "I like it". One older student double-checked the positive answer, one older student added the word "great!", and a third older student added the words "very much!". Of the younger students, those aged in the 17-25 bracket, 2 students checked "I like it" and 2 students checked "It's OK, I guess."

The written comments of students are especially thought-provoking and encouraging to those who strongly favor intergenerational learning experiences. Here are their reactions to items 3-6 in the questionnaire.

LIKES AND DISLIKES

What, if anything, do you LIKE about an intergenerational class?

YOUNGER STUDENTS: It's a good idea. Both are allowed to see and understand the life-styles of both age groups.

In the intergenerational class you observe different things from different age groups. You also learn from them. I enjoy listening to the older people with their stories of experience.

Triton College

QUESTIONNAIRE -- WORLD RELIGIONS COURSE -- FALL 1990

1. Please check your age bracket.

   __ 17-25 __ 26-40 __ 41-60 __ over 60

2. How do you feel about learning in a class of younger and older students?

   __ I like it. __ It's OK, I guess. __ I'd rather be with students about my age.

3. What, if anything, do you LIKE about an intergenerational class? Write a few words or sentences.

4. What, if anything, do you NOT LIKE about an intergenerational class?

5. Do you think your attitude toward older or younger students changed even a little because of this class? __YES __NO
   If yes, explain the change in a few words or sentences.

6. Any further comments or suggestions about intergenerational education and relationships at Triton or in society as a whole?

I like being with the different generations and to be able to see the differences in our beliefs.

I like hearing and learning about the older generations' beliefs, and the thoughts of both generations sometimes differ.

OLDER STUDENTS: I enjoy all the different viewpoints, and the coming together of ideas, pro and con, makes it a more rounded discussion with youth and wisdom together.

One gets the younger generation's opinions. Not having children of our own, this is an opportunity to mix with youth.

I like it very much, particularly the mix of ideas between youth and seniors. Hearing young people express a thought I had not thought about, understanding from another's angle, opens my mind to another way of thinking.

What do I like? More viewpoints -- intergenerational. (An intergenerational class) provides more insight, enthusiasm, and student interest.

Discussions and opinions are varied and much more interesting.

More exciting -- one gets a balanced view of the subject. Integration is always beneficial!

<u>What, if anything, do you NOT LIKE about an intergenerational class?</u>

YOUNGER STUDENTS: Nothing really except some of the older students carry a feeling of superiority over the younger students.

Sometimes the older people put the younger ones down. They can't relate to the younger ones and they can't face up to new ways of the world.

I felt that some of the older students weren't open to treating us younger students on the same level as them.

The teachings and lessons seemed to be geared toward the older generation.

OLDER STUDENTS: Sometimes it seems the younger students are insecure in speaking up, could be through respect.

Older students tend to be opinionated and foist their opinions on impressionable young people, but the instructor can control this to prevent polarizing the groups.

(Note: Two older students indicated there was nothing they did not like and four older students wrote no reply, apparently also indicating that there was nothing they did not like.)

ATTITUDES

Do you think your attitude toward older or younger students changed even a little because of this class?

YOUNGER STUDENTS:	2 yes	2 no
OLDER STUDENTS:	5 yes	2 no
	2 no answer	

COMMENTS FROM YOUNGER STUDENTS REGARDING ATTITUDE:

In some cases they have reaffirmed my feeling that they look down on the younger generation. But some have softened my heart toward them.

Now it seems affirmed that they (older people) can't relate to the younger generation.

I think it's very interesting to be able to share our different experiences with each other, and for that reason we had something to offer each other to deepen our learning experience.

COMMENTS FROM OLDER STUDENTS REGARDING ATTITUDE:

I have taken Triton classes before and do enjoy the mixture of ages.

I have a good relationship with young people and enjoyed sharing discussions with them.

(From the class I got) a more balanced point of view.

With my children grown and far away and with most of my friends my own age, I've lost touch with what has been going on. I enjoyed listening to the stories and problems of younger students.

I did not have a change of attitude. However, I feel closer to understanding the younger views.

The young in this class impressed me with their progressive and friendly attitude.

Many (of the younger students) are very concerned about our world.

Any further comments or suggestions about intergenerational education and relationships at Triton or in society as a whole?

YOUNGER STUDENTS:

I feel we must look at each other with eyes of equality instead of eyes of suspicion.

If it is possible, try to have more (intergenerational) classes. It is a good experience to go through.

I think the learning experience is invaluable, especially in this course seeing as we all could give to each other.

(NOTE: One student wrote no comment or suggestion.)

OLDER STUDENTS:

In order for people to get along, they must look beyond their peer group and see what's going on around them.

I feel the young people in some cases need to respect the older people more. We all get old some day, and it's a hard climb and when you reach that point, it would be nice to be respected by the young generation.

It would be wonderful to enjoy such an ideal relationship, but don't know if the young people would feel the same way. We represent parents, teachers, etc. and they are reluctant to express their feelings for fear of criticism, shock, etc.

All classes should be intergenerational. Both generations profit. What a better understanding we all get from each other!

By all means, keep it up!

We need more opportunities to do this in all walks of life.

I think it should be continued. Both age groups can gain from their contact with each other.

(From an older student who is moving away: I'm going to miss Triton and all the friends I've enjoyed in all classes. I'll try to get such an (intergenerational) class started in Southern Illinois College!)

CONCLUSION

The questionnaire responses, few as they are, do suggest at least two conclusions about Triton's fall, 1990 World Religions course that may have implications for others planning intergenerational learning experiences.

1. Younger students felt they were treated somewhat condescendingly -- without respect. Only one older student -- perhaps surprisingly -- felt a lack of respect from younger students. This reaction might be reversed in a course where firm opinions based on long past experience are not important, as in a mathematics or computer course!

2. Despite some feelings of condescension on the part of younger students, all students -- younger and older -- strongly supported mixed-age classes as beneficial to learning. Here again are some of the words they used to describe the intergenerational learning experience: a more rounded discussion....opens my mind....more insight....enthusiasm....exciting....lively....invaluable.

In a world where younger people and rapidly growing numbers of older people must live together, work together, and make decisions together as citizens on an equal basis of participation and responsibility, it would seem extremely important for them to learn together on an equal basis. If older people "can't relate to the younger ones" and if they "can't face up to the new ways of the world," they need many opportunities to learn to do so. If younger people are "insecure in speaking up" or "need to respect older people more", they too need many opportunities to learn to do so. As one younger student said so well: WE MUST LOOK AT EACH OTHER WITH EYES OF EQUALITY INSTEAD OF EYES OF SUSPICION.

Age-integrated education clearly serves the interests of both younger and older people. Older people have much to learn from younger people, and, as I wrote in a booklet several years ago,

WITH EYES OF EQUALITY

"Younger people can learn from older people, who have lived through the history that younger people can only read about or see and hear in audiovisual media. Older people can bring to classrooms a wealth of experiences, high motivation, and a seriousness of purpose....People of all ages -- as well as of both sexes and of many racial and ethnic backgrounds - need to think and talk together, not only about the past but about the future."*

*Education for Older People: Another View of Mainstreaming by June Sark Heinrich. Fastback 181, 1982, Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, Bloomington, Indiana.

WHY DOES TRITON HAVE A SPECIAL PROGRAM FOR OLDER ADULTS?

1. Older adults have been stereotyped as poor learners - with deteriorating brains and memories inadequate for educational challenges. Many older adults themselves appear to accept this stereotype. Also, older adults are often regarded as not needing challenging education or career training.

   Triton's Senior Studies Program helps destroy the stereotype of older adults as poor, unmotivated learners by making it attractive for older adults to take short-term classes held during convenient daytime hours and proving to them that they can learn - and enjoy learning and profit by it in all the ways younger students profit by it.

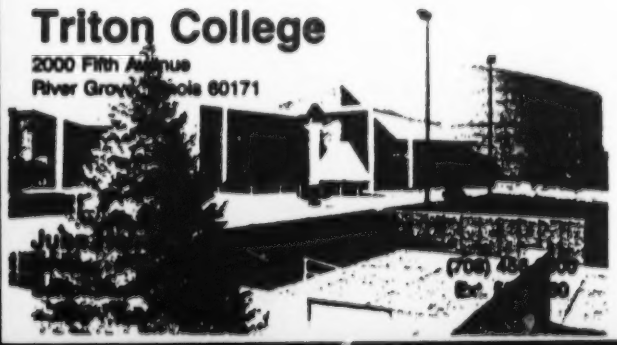
2. Many older adults have been away from organized learning in classes so long that they are uncomfortable in classes with younger, school-accustomed students.

   Triton's Senior Studies Program offers older adults classes with people of similar age and with instructors who believe in their ability and need to learn and who value the varied life experiences of older adults.

3. Many older adults seem to like being with other older adults at least part of the time because they share memories of similar times and events and have some common problems and needs. Furthermore, many older adults have feelings of exclusion and uselessness as they leave jobs or are forced out, as their children leave home, and as relatives and friends die.

   Triton's Senior Studies Program offers a supportive togetherness - in classes, clubs, and tours - that many older adults value and need. The Senior Studies Program also offers courses related to some interests and needs shared by many older adults, such as overcoming loss, living alone, staying healthy, etc. The Senior Studies Program is not meant to be a place of confinement or age segregation but rather it aims to be a supporting, inviting bridge to credit classes, job training, cultural activities, and all the other opportunities available to older adults at Triton and increasingly available in society at large.

Continued....



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4. Many older adults cannot or will not go to classes and other activities in the evening, and most "regular" continuing-education classes offered at Triton are held in the evening to accommodate adults who work outside their homes.

   Triton's Senior Studies Program offers classes during daytime hours when many older adults are willing to leave their homes to attend classes and other activities.

5. Many older adults are reluctant to take college credit courses and work toward degrees although they could benefit from such courses and the college could benefit from having them increase the number of students in credit courses many older adults are likely to take -- liberal arts courses, for example.

   Triton's Senior Studies Program promotes credit courses likely to interest many older adults and provides encouragement and support. The Senior Studies Program also offers a Lifelong Learner Program in the Liberal Arts through which students can earn a Lifelong Learner Certificate and gold key pin.

6. Today approximately 12 to 15 percent of the U.S. population is 65 or older, and the number is growing rapidly. By 2030, it is predicted that about 25 percent of the U.S. population will be 65 or older. Older people will likely be working longer at full-time jobs and at part-time jobs and will likely need re-training for jobs. They will need increasing educational services of all kinds. They tend to vote and to be a powerful political force, and as their numbers grow they will likely be an <u>increasingly</u> powerful political force.

   The educational needs of older adults must be a continuing major concern of a community college like Triton because they make up a rapidly increasing proportion of the Triton district and because Triton needs their support. At present, the Senior Studies Program fills needs many older adults have.

IN CONCLUSION: There is at present a clear need in a community college for a place and program where older adults can come together for support in their pursuit of learning. The Senior Studies Program at Triton serves as a meeting place, a support group, a place where older adults can learn successfully and where they can acquire the self-confidence or just the information and encouragement they need to take advantage of the many opportunities available to them at Triton.

FROM TRITON COLLEGE
OLDER ADULTS PROGRAM
OPEN TO ADULTS OF ALL AGES

Lifelong Learner Program in the Liberal Arts

- Daytime weekly or biweekly classes
- Outstanding instructors
- No past-schooling requirements
- No formal tests or grades
- No diplomas or degrees

But, if you wish, you can earn a Lifelong Learner Certificate and Gold Key Pin as evidence of the value you and Triton College place on lifelong learning in the liberal arts.

Who should take Lifelong Learner courses?

Any adult who values and desires continuing education in the liberal arts.

Any adult who wants an active, growing mind.

Any adult who wants to know the best that has been thought and said and done in the world.

Any adult who wants to **enjoy** becoming more broadly educated.

What past education should you have?

There are no requirements as to past education. All you need is a desire to become more broadly educated and to have a good time doing so along with people of different ages and backgrounds.

How do you earn a Lifelong Learner Certificate and Key?

Each fall or spring term, you take one or more of the daytime courses designated Lifelong Learner courses. When you have completed requirements for 6 Lifelong Learner courses, you will be awarded a Lifelong Learner Certificate and Gold Key Pin.

How do you complete course requirements?

Attend class regularly.

Take part in all class activities.

Plan with the instructor and complete an individual project.

The Community College-Nursing Home Partnership
Improving Care Through Education

FUNDED BY THE W. K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

Fall 1989
Vol. 2 No. 2

Triton College
Education Center on Aging

GOOD LEARNING IN NURSING HOMES

June Heinrich, Ph.D.
Coordinator, Older Adults Program
Triton College

"I'm not going to take a shower if I have to miss class." (Nursing Home Resident)
"It's wonderful! A resident who rarely speaks - burst out in song." (Staff Member)
"I would like to see other courses offered here." (Community Member)
"The course helped me care more about residents." (Staff Member)

These are comments by students in two community college courses in two nursing homes in the Triton College district from March to June, 1989. The nursing homes were Westlake Pavilion in Franklin Park, IL, and Norridge Nursing Centre in Norridge, IL. The students were a mix of nursing home residents, staff members, and outside community people. The courses were "Learning to Enjoy Singing in a Group", taught by Dr. Harry Steckman, an instructor with many years of teaching and choral directing experience, and "Focusing: Changing Your Life Creatively," a practical psychology course in learning to listen to yourself and others taught also by a highly experienced instructor, Bebe Simon.

The courses were made possible by Triton College's Education Center on Aging, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Triton's Older Adults Program. The Education Center on Aging is a resource center of information about aging for health-care professionals and others interested in learning about the aging process. The Older Adults Program offers daytime courses in a wide variety of subjects for older adults and interested younger adults. The philosophic basis of the program is expressed clearly in a large sign in one of the Triton classrooms: YOU ARE NEVER TOO OLD TO LEARN.

Although courses offered on the Triton campus are also offered in some community locations, they have never been offered in nursing homes before. The need and capability of nursing-home residents for challenging learning has not been recognized and no other alternative for payment of fees was identified. The purpose of the pilot project was to demonstrate that some nursing-home residents could and should benefit from the same courses offered to adult students in other off-campus settings. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that members of the nursing home staffs and community residents outside the nursing home could benefit from being included in the classes. The idea was to bring

Staff, residents and students from Triton's older Adult class all chime in during the last day of class at Westlake Pavilion "Learning to Enjoy Singing in a Group".

together this mix of students, in order that they might not only benefit individually from the learning opportunity but that they might also broaden their attitudes toward one another and toward the nursing home. They would come to class—not as caregivers and careneeders—but as equals, all with the ability to learn and to enjoy learning.

To get some measure of whether changes did, in fact, take place, pre-tests and post-tests were given to the 52 students in the pilot project and also to the two instructors. It is anticipated that statistical findings may indicate only slight changes in the participants. However, the courses have clearly left positive marks on students and nursing homes. For example, a nursing home resident and staff member are overheard making plans to get together to practice their newly acquired listening skills. Each will listen to the other for an agreed-upon time without commenting or giving advice! And in one of the nursing homes several weeks after the end of the music class, some of the former students—both residents and staff-members are still singing as they go through the hallways a song they learned in class:

You can sing a rainbow,
Sing a rainbow,
Sing a rainbow too!

A rainbow: a symbol of hope, hope that nursing homes—for those growing numbers of us who need them—can also be good places in which to learn, to work and to live!

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
OCT 25 1991

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